Vol. 3 No. 9

departure

A MAGAZINE OF LITERATURE AND THE ARTS

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VOLUME THREE NUMBER NINE

OPTING OUT

WE publish in this number an article in the series 'The Literary Situation', by Lawrence Lipton. Like the article by the same author in last September's issue of the *London Magazine,* it is an assessment of the attitude of some present-day American writers to the world in which they find themselves. It traces the development among these writers of a departure from the accepted values of their society far more radical and uncompromising than any previous protest.

Implicit in it is the assumption that, for the writer — and, we would add, for all truly responsible persons — the material rewards offered by our kind of society are most often gained at too high a price in integrity and happiness. English writers and artists are at least not asked to subscribe to the values of a business civilisation so brazenly as they are often asked in the U.S.A., but the same demand is undeniably made on them. Such a demand was present, for example, in the recent letter in *The Times* from an advertiser, who suggested that artists asked to design advertising copy would benefit from having a definite task to perform and would thereby be relieved of the painful necessity of seeking their own ideas. Cant of this kind is no less dangerous when it is politely and plausibly stated as a reasoned businessman's point of view. If anything, it is the more dangerous because it stands a better chance of acceptance when the difference between the divergent interests of the artistic world and of the advertising world is so discreetly blurred.

Where we would dissent from Mr Lipton's view is in the extent to which an artist should detach himself from his society. That detachment seems to us to have no point if the rejection is complete, and to be morally defensible only if it can be regarded as a responsible act in itself — e.g., as a protest against the conduct of society while hoping, still, that ultimately it might be induced to set its house in order. But we should like to believe that this article will stir interest, and influence some of the perennial discussions on the artist's place in society. It would be especially gratifying if Mr Lipton's remarks on the pattern of living chosen by the writer — his use of his income, his choice of a home, his standard of personal comfort — led to some close re-thinking about his position in a welfare capitalist state which is trying to double its standard of living in the next twenty-five years.

WILLIAM EMPSON

*Letter IV**

Choked in a sullen darkness of dry sand
The child cicada some brave root discovers;
Sucks with dumb mouth while the long climb is planned
That high must tunnel through the dust that smothers;
Parturient with urine, once his lover's,
Coheres from chaos, only to evade,
An ordered Nature his own waste has made,
And builds his mortared Babel from eternal shade.

Into the unpointed Atlantic of my boat:
Its endless cold; its scream of gulls: the claw,
A Roman feather, at the back of the throat:
Wave-shutter, hanging, flapping, nape and jaw;
You lay your breadth of sunbeam and I soar
As tear-clouds, safe below their maker, move,
In air-ship's gross security, rove and prove
The virgin's fertile lands, Spain-stolen, treasure-trove.

With highest in his bowels (God had come)
Israel, determined to digest, had striven;
' I will not let thee go ' told Helium,
The unvalenced self-enclosing air of heaven.
We rise with a more earth-born gas as leaven,
Cheaper, less ' bitter in the belly ', free,
Bursting, to make but little in the sea,
And by its closing, scatter us from our empyry.

Therefore, my dear, though you may have it all
As giving goes, the car more safe should ride,
Hold the star-netting of a larger ball,
And lay its eggs in wickerwork skywide:
Stars less monogamously deified:
Who, not by light, merely by being far,
Make real Rotational Phenomena,
Prove that I satellite and you true centre are.

Who, being fixed and far, calm and surprise:
Being no farther, shutter and enclose
A rounded universe: who name the size,

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*The early version, published in Cambridge in 1929.

Receive the creature, that can count the rows.
And as your sun, by yielding beauty, glows
And moves upon the planet, they, as strong,
Resound, by being held aloof, their song,
Compose earth's nature, are his laws, consist his throng.

RICHARD EBERHART

Autumnal

Action is a pain of being,
  Being is a rain of knowing,
    Knowing is a sense of self,
      Lovely the day

Thereof. Would you have it otherwise?
  A peak of ants of little size
    Obstructs me on the sidewalk,
      All clamouring talk.

The statues are lying around on the green
  Seeing what they have seen
    As lovers pass in the grasses,
      Elemental, massive.

Big clouds and little clouds cohere
  In arguments this time of year,
    Unclassified; they are lapses
      Floating, dappled.

Dogs are in and out. And bees
  Are falling into cider granneries
    Fat as unbottoned fops.
      One drops, another drops.

We have been living the full year,
  It is still full, it is here
    In the late recline of sun,
      A red grand one.

What is going on beyond
  I have not found, am bound
    To the love of the unfound
      Beyond, but here.

BERNARD BERGONZI

A Meditation in April

It is a bright and uncommitted sun:
the Eye of Heaven with a neutral stare.
I welcome it; although a moving cloud
of sins swarm upward in its light,
the sun is their condition, not their cause.

The season starts this problem year by year:
the sudden rush of sap is good,
but sap and wickedness together rise.
Shriven today, I skirt the question now,
whilst walking in a sunny park.

Deeply frozen, human seed will die;
or if it live, will die on being thawed.
So, after winter's accidie,
this penitential grace
may kill the quickening errors of the spring.

But April brings an old desire for song:
are such desires as good as sap or sun?
They may be; but the part without a bone,
by which I mean the tongue,
is dangerous: most songs are lies.

And you were formed for Truth,
and Truth is hard, immutable, a rock
with characters of Greek incised on it;
when it sings, the rise and fall is formal, fixed,
not moved by careless promptings in the blood.

So if you sang, here in a budding wood,
with surging heart and soft expectant eyes,
remember that the burden of your song
might truly be:
'What I am singing now is false.'

Imagination never was baptized,
excess of sweetness quickly clogs the tongue.
Cold as stone, the intellect and will
alone know how to pray. A jangling lyre
would blur the strict design of Truth.

GABRIEL PEARSON

The Confession

Incomplete — that was his reason given
to the world; without a world there is no heaven;
celestial boughs, he argued, root from earth,
and the redeemed imply the pangs of birth.

But his heart whispered other reasons; she
is reckless, throws down her winds upon this sea
of calm, and tears tall waves there; I must storm;
for she defines the tempest in her form.

I am her victim — in the afternoon
of a great heat she tracked me, took me; soon
my senses purred that under my paws she lay:
I did not dream the slain could learn to slay;

and so I die each day: each night renew
my death in what I kill, and piercing through
yesterday's flesh, remember that I but
rejoin in new proportions what I cut.

Oh, where's that granite constancy I thought
I bruised on once; mutation's now the sport;
edge of those eyes tears trickle from, when will
your sunlight blunt, and two great worlds grow still?

Not fused: but clay shaped, shaped again, each feature
pliant and unremembered as the creature
that tracked its image in the pool: what pride
conceives at once self-birth and suicide?

DISAFFILIATION AND THE ART OF POVERTY

by Lawrence Lipton

WILLIAM FAULKNER, the novelist and 1949 Nobel Prize winner, remarked to a New York interviewer recently, 'I was born to be a tramp. I was happiest when I had nothing. I had a trench coat then with big pockets. It would carry a pair of socks, a condensed Shakespeare, and a bottle of whiskey. Then I was happy and I wanted nothing and had no responsibility.'

A best-selling author once remarked to me in a moment of thoughtful introspection, 'I used to think I'd be freer to speak out and write the things I wanted to write once I had the public ear and became independently wealthy. Now I know that you can write such things only when you're independently poor.'

And another writer, who for obvious reasons must go unnamed, wrote to me after reading an article of mine on poverty as a way of life for the artist, in the *London Magazine,* 'All my life I've been struggling to stay poor, but I can no longer afford it. My wife has impoverished me.'

At the same time Malcolm Cowley, the U.S. critic, reports in his book, *The Literary Situation*: 'Aside from the hard-working authors of textbooks, standard juveniles, mysteries, and westerns, I doubt that 200 Americans earned the major portion of their income, year after year, by writing hard-cover books.' The U.S. census for 1950 counted 16,184 authors and reported that their average income was $3,000, well below the $3,700 average for industrial workers. And in 1954 the sale of best-selling novels had fallen to the point where only twenty-five novels sold as many as 50,000 copies, which means that no more than twenty-five fiction writers earned as much as $25,000 in hard-cover income for two or three years' work.

If this is an authentic picture of the economic status of the writer in the U.S. (and presumably the situation is a similar one in England) one may ask, why raise any question of choice in the matter? Is not poverty, whether a blessing or a curse, thrust upon the writer?

The urgency of the problem stems precisely from this, that despite the low incidence of wealth or even minimum subsistence in the writer's financial status, he feels himself faced with the problem of choosing between a way of writing, and living, that leads to *possible* wealth, and a way that leads to almost certain poverty. And there is always the hope that somehow, somewhere between the two lies the possibility of an income-level that presents the writer with none of the problems of either extreme. In any case, regardless of the statistical possibilities, the lust for fortune, and the fame that is always coupled with it in the well-known phrase — for more than alliteration's sake, one suspects —

is a lust that does not seem to abate when confronted with census figures. As long as the figures show at least *one* possibility of wealth earned by writing, the writer may be tempted to cherish the hope that he might be that one. And even so, if he possesses any degree of artistic integrity at all, he will feel himself faced with the problem of choice. For poverty and integrity, like fame and fortune, has its tradition in the writer's craft and sullen art.

To the artist this has always been a problem that offered more moral complexities than to others because what he has to sell is at one and the same time an article of merchandise and an act of love. If the one is not to become identical with the other he must choose that way of life which is least likely to lead to prostitution. Poverty comes highly recommended to him by religion, moral precept, and literary history.

The poverty which it is my purpose to examine in these pages bears only a family resemblance to the religious vow of poverty, or the picturesque and mostly spurious poverty of literary bohemianism. This poverty is the poverty of disaffiliation, the voluntary poverty of those who have turned their backs on the bitch goddess Success and are learning what it feels like to be independently poor. It is the poverty to which William Faulkner looks back so wistfully, which the best-selling author has belatedly discovered, and which my correspondent can no longer afford because of the extravagances of his wife.

In the U.S. the problem has taken on a new and pressing importance in recent years because the priests and policemen of the bitch goddess are demanding, as never before, that the arts do service at her shrine. The most gifted U.S. writers have never given allegiance to the business civilisation, the acquisitive society — to give it only two of the many pejorative names which its literary men have bestowed upon it. Today they are documenting the decay of its social and moral values with such a plain assurance of its impending collapse that its die-hard defenders are crying treason and demanding loyalty oaths. The first victims of the 'loyalty' inquisition were not spies or communists, but writers for the mass communications media — motion picture and radio writers. They were the first to be cited for contempt of congressional committees and jailed by the courts ; political prisoners in every sense of the word. Those who 'confessed' and became friendly witnesses' were not forgiven until they informed on others, and even then they were not reinstated in their writing jobs until they proved their loyalty by writing pieces in praise of 'free', that is, private enterprise, business advertising, singing commercials, and 'clean' thinking.

What we are witnessing in the U.S. is a public demonstration of the fact that there is no right of free speech in the mass media of a society that is thought-controlled by upper-class interests. If this is less true of England, France, and Italy, it may be only because in these

countries it is too soon — or too late — for the ruling groups to be so open and high-handed about it.

Hand in hand with the loyalty oaths and investigations has gone a widespread propaganda campaign against all intellectuals. The word ' intellectual ' has never been quite free from suspicion in the U.S. The current word for the intellectual is ' egg-head ', the equivalent in present political polemics for the milder ' brain trust ' of the New Deal days. All intellectualism, needless to say, is equated with leftism in politics and even with experimentalism and ' modernism ' in the arts.

Faced with powerful and well-financed forces of suppression, the U.S. artist and writer has certain alternatives open to him. He can ' tell all ', implicating everybody he ever knew who was in favour of free school lunches, T.V.A., or ' the welfare state '; he can make a fight of it on constitutional grounds, as the ' unfriendly witnesses ' did, and carry the issue to the courts (it didn't save them from imprisonment) ; he can take his stand with the Liberals who are crying that literary leftism should be tolerated because it is ' harmless ' and without social or political effect — and thus playing into the hands of the anti-intellectual vendetta, to say nothing of belying history and stultifying themselves as intellectuals ; he can abandon the arts and go to work driving a hack — if he hasn't already been publicly ' exposed ' and blacklisted by all ' loyal ' employers ; or he can go right on using any form or content he pleases in his work, displaying it in whatever places and media are still open to him, and risking the consequences.

The literary and artistic scene in the U.S. today presents examples of writers and artists who have taken one or another of these alternative courses of action. The best-known names are those of the unfriendly witnesses ; they have been given the most publicity. Next well known are those who confessed and informed ; they have their day in the television limelight and are quickly forgotten. Those who threw in their lot with the Liberal Press continue to be *causes célèbres,* and continue to suffer the same disabilities as the unfriendlier and more militant witnesses ; the cab drivers try, for the most part, to maintain a bitter and sullen silence, except when they are encouraged to pour their tale of outraged innocence into sympathetic ears. And the incorrigibles who refuse to be brain-washed or brow-beaten are turning their backs upon the mass media, finding, or creating, their own outlets — if they are playwrights, in the off-Broadway houses, if they are novelists, in the paperbacks, and if they are poets and short story writers, in the little magazines.

The poets have the best of it, of course, what with something like 250 little magazines being published today in English-reading countries. To be sure, the number of these publications that welcome political nonconformity and social protest is not as large as the number that welcome technical nonconformity, but the field is relatively open

to them. They are likewise free from the congressional snoopers — so far — partly, no doubt, because poetry isn't taken seriously enough in ruling circles to be considered a threat, and partly, too, because the snoopers can't read poetry. The poets have that much to be thankful for to a generation of bad poetry-teaching methods in the public schools. For the time being, at least, the poets are safe, for the same reason that, according to La Rochefoucauld, virtuous women, like buried treasure, are safe, ' because no one is seeking them '.

Besides, the most uncompromising and alienated among American poets adopted disaffiliation and poverty as a way of life long before egg-heads began to roll. E. E. Cummings (if he will forgive the nonconformity of my upper-case spelling) is one of these long-time nonconformists. So is Robinson Jeffers, who long ago declared in *Shine, Perishing Republic,* that ' While this America settles in the mold of its vulgarity ' he would keep his distance ' from the thickening center ' and that ' corruption / Never has been compulsory, when the cities lie at the monster's feet there are left the mountains; and found himself a mountain on one of the farthermost promontories of the West Coast from which he has been hurling his Doom Song ever since. Kenneth Patchen has long continued to speak out of his own chosen kind of disaffiliation and chosen (if not always unresented) poverty.

Cummings and Patchen are two of America's best lyric poets, a genre that readers (and some critics) who have forgotten their Burns and Blake do not usually associate with social protest, and each has in his own way, Patchen more frequently, more consistently than Cummings, continued to sound the note of forewarning and vaticination. Kenneth Rexroth is of this company, sending out from his humble San Francisco home volume after volume of tightly-knit narrative verse illuminated like some priceless mediaeval manuscript with allusions to Greece, China, Japan, indeed to all the literatures of the world, and every line of it focused like a probing finger of light and fire on the diseases and corruption of our time. Or from the nearby mountains that are his occasional retreat, where ' The great geometrical winter constellations / Lift up over the Sierra Nevada ', seeing ' Spain / Under the black windy sky . . . And men waiting, clutched with cold and huddled together, / As an unknown place goes over them ', seeing ' the unwritten books, the unrecorded experiments / The unpainted pictures ' of Spanish geniuses with their ' interrupted lives, / Lowered into the graves ' (*Requiem for the Spanish dead*). And William Pillin, bringing his almost unmatched lyric gift to such a statement as:

> ' It is obscene to speak of aim
> In context of haphazard pain;
> Believe me, gentlemen of state,
> Whoever dies is dead in vain.'

And Leslie Woolf Hedley, in *Solo on the Murder of Poets*:

> ' Yesterday was a day of guns
> Today prepares a day of prisons . . .
> There is disease in the east
> There is disease in the west
> And like gladiators saluting doom
> We write poems like skyrockets
> That rise above our diminishing day.'

and yet declaring, in *Affirmation,* that —

> ' Somehow the best will remain and live
> Cut into centuries of rock and steel
> Pages of past and present
> Alive like the immutable seeing stars
> And cry of the phoenix across our night.'

Of this company, too, is Thomas McGrath, whose poetic idiom though thoroughly modern, utilising as he sometimes does jazz themes and rhythms, is in the great Fool tradition of the *Vagantenlieder* and the goliard poetry of the Middle Ages ; James Boyer May, who has fashioned an idiom of his own, an oblique and complex idiom but one which frequently finds its mark just as unerringly on such festering focal spots of the time's contagion as ' air-conditioned fagtail bars . . . dim chromium haunts ' where ' the listless wealthy come . . . to diddle with desire / which won't reglow in them ' and watch ' sex-numb boredoms ' and boxing matches on the television screen, and, in his poem, *On Defending Subversive Citizens,* invokes the name of Thomas Paine ' and other dangerous men who fathered us ' against contemporary tyrannies ; and, in prose — a prose that has defied the classifications of the rules and the schools — Henry Miller, whose books have been a bible of the disaffiliated for the last two decades not only in the U.S. but in Europe and the rest of the world as well.

All of these are of the company of those who ' wage contention with their time's decay ', and all of them, with the exception of Cummings, live on the West Coast. Perhaps they were following the example of Robinson Jeffers, but those who have made the westward trek will tell you that there is something about crossing the Great Divide and, with your back to the Pacific Ocean, looking back across the vast expanse of the continent — something that turns the mind to re-evaluation, fresh appraisals, a feeling of Land's End and where do we go from here?

All the corruptions that infect the civic and cultural life of the shining but perishing republic are present on the West Coast as they are elsewhere, some of them worse than elsewhere, but the feeling of being able to survey the scene from a back-to-the-wall vantage point

still persists. At any rate there is no doubt that it pervades the work of all the leading West Coast writers. Most of the novelists who share the same sense of disaffiliation, however, live in the Middle West and in the East. The South has its own brand of disaffiliation, an alienation based for the most part on a neo-agrarian, anti-industrialist protest, or on an aestheticism of the ivory tower variety.

I have dealt with the novelists of the disaffiliation elsewhere,[1] writers like Nelson Algren, Ralph Ellison, George Mandel, J. D. Salinger, Chester Himes, Horace McCoy, and William Manchester, whose leading characters are all people who have disaffiliated themselves in one way or another from the prevailing values of the business civilisation. This may be said to represent a new type of alienation in the American novel. In past alienations the characters were also represented as in a state of revolt against prevailing norms and values, but what they were protesting was their right to *belong*, their right to a normal acceptance by the community, and their right to the normal rewards of social acceptance. The characters in these new novels may begin by acceping the prevailing values but they all end by rejecting not only the values but the rewards as well. Their alienation is complete, and it is for this reason that I have given this new kind of alienation the name of disaffiliation.[2] To realise how complete this new alienation is one need only try to imagine the fictional protagonists of earlier alienations talking and behaving like the characters in these new novels. Imagine, for instance, Dreiser's Sister Carrie talking about the American way of life as a ' rat race ' at the age of seventeen, the way Diane Lattimer does in George Mandel's *Flee the Angry Strangers.* Or imagine any of F. Scott Fitzgerald's heroes declaring in his early teens, ' My father wants me to go to Yale, or maybe Princeton, but I swear, I wouldn't go one of those Ivy League colleges if I was *dying,* for God's sake,' the way young Caulfield does in Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye.* Caulfield's father belongs to F. Scott Fitzgerald's Jazz Age 'twenties, the Coolidge Boom which ended for the U.S. as it ended for Fitzgerald in *The Crack-Up* and the Depression 'Thirties. His alienation was the anti-Babbittry of Sinclair Lewis and H. L. Mencken, which at no point challenged the foundations of capitalism itself as a way of life. Young Caulfield belongs to the generation that is asking, like Lizzie in *Flee the Angry Strangers,* when the police nabbed Magoo, the poor demented junkie, ' Whyn't they bust a big one . . . like Wall Street . . . the skyline . . . the Empire State?' Or Joe who saw a greater, more dangerous insanity than the junkies' in ' the acceptance of it all '

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[1] *The World Behind the Billboards,* in the *London Magazine,* September, 1955. See also John Lehmann's editorial Foreword on the implications of my article for British writers, in the same issue.

[2] For a fuller treatment of disaffiliation see my article, *Disaffiliation: The New Nonconformism,* in the U.S. weekly, *The Nation,* November 5th, 1955.

the moral cowardice of an age that jailed the victims and let the criminals rule, ' the men who cornered the wealth that could clear slums, provide schools and hospitals, tender aid to the tormented in side streets and alleyways the world over.' The Wild Party of Fitzgerald's Jazz Age was a Y.M.C.A. social compared with the Big Party as Fred Cameron sees it in Manchester's *City of Anger,* a picture that is documented for the years that followed by all of these disaffiliated novelists — the hot-rod mania and ' anything for kicks ', the growing accident and suicide rates, juvenile crime, ' every American variety of displaced persons ' seeking escape and narcosis, a 'whole world hooked'.

Why disaffiliation and voluntary poverty at a time when Henry Luce's *Life-Time-Fortune* publications are documenting an American Way of Life and a world-conquering American Century that is filled with colour-matched stainless steel kitchens, bigger and faster motor cars, electronic wonders, and a future of unlimited luxuries filled with promises of television-telephones and rocket trips to the moon? Because in the eyes of a Nelson Algren this bright new shining world is a ' neon wilderness ', in the eyes of a Henry Miller it is all an ' air-conditioned nightmare '. Because, as Kenneth Rexroth has put it, you can't fill the heads of young lovers with ' buy me the new five-hundred-dollar refrigerator and I'll love you ' advertising propaganda without poisoning the very act of love itself. Because, according to Mandel and Manchester, you can't hop up your juveniles with sadism in the movies and television and then expect to detense them with Coca Cola and Y.M.C.A. hymn-sings. Because underneath all the shining new gadgets of Henry Luce's ' permanent revolution ' and ' Prosperity Unlimited ' the foundations are being eaten away by a dog-eat-dog lust for bigger and better profits wrung from a war-production economy that is a design not for living but for death, the Great Fact of the hydrogen bomb. ' I don't want to startle you, but they are going to kill most of us ', is the title of one of Kenneth Patchen's poems.

This is what they are disaffiliating themselves from. Not, let me make it plain — as they are making it plain in every word and line of their poems and novels — not from the *things,* the labour-saving inventions, the useful things or even the luxuries, not from the life-saving byproducts of the atom bomb — but from the lying, defrauding, profit-gouging exploitation of these things.

And why the poverty? Because the price of Mr Luce's new prosperity is too high. For the writer and artist it means abandoning all social protest in literature as out of date (before the Luce ' revolution ') as Mr Luce's editorial writers laid down the new line in ' Wanted: An American Novel ' (*Life,* September 12th, 1955). It means singing the praises of Big Business and the New Executive type — dreamed up by Mr Luce's *Fortune* writers — in novels like *Executive Suite* and the other ' romance of business ' novels and movies that have followed it.

Whatever the financial rewards, the price is too high.

The poverty of which I speak is an independent poverty, a voluntary poverty. The writer or artist may not have much control over the size of his income — a book may flop or it may become a run-away best-seller and make a small fortune for the writer — but he does have some measure of control over how much he spends. And how he spends it. And where he lives. For, as Nelson Algren has expressed it, scarcely any way now remains of reporting the American Century except from behind the tote-board. From behind the TV commercials and the Hearst headlines, the car-ads and the sub-titles, the editorials and the conventions. ' For it is only there that the people of Dickens and Dostoievsky may be found once more.'

Behind the tote-board means the slum, the kind of a Chicago slum where Nelson Algren found his Frankie Machine (*The Man with the Golden Arm*) and all the characters of his novels. A home in a workingclass neighbourhood, living on a workingman's income, that is the poverty. And, if writing alone will not yield that level of income, any labour that is not anti-social or immoral — like working in a ' defence ' plant (defence against what?) and producing for murder ; Murder, Inc., some are calling it today — is preferable to singing for your supper — singing commercials — as Mr Luce would have the author do. It isn't a question of royalties but of loyalties. If the writer will hold his standard of living and his way of life down to the level of what I call the dedicated independent poverty he will be able to retain the long lean view, the clean vision that reveals the Diane Lattimers and the Frankie Machines. He will not have to look back wistfully a decade or two hence to the days when he had a trench coat, a pair of socks, and a condensed Shakespeare, when he was foot-loose and happy and wanted nothing, because he had everything that a writer needs to see his world clean and straight and put it on paper with honesty and art. He will not have to discover years later, when it is too late, that ' you can write such things only when you're independently poor.' And no luxury-loving wife will impoverish him below the level of independent poverty because no luxury-demanding woman will marry him in the first place, and if she should, or he should, he will leave her flat and go his own way, love or no love, just as he has left the fiesh-pots of the bitch goddess Success behind him, love or no love. He will not complain, as Malcolm Cowley does, that art does not pay — enough.

And he will know where his duty lies: to take his stand (again in the words of Nelson Algren) ' forever with the accused. Guilty or not guilty, with the accused '.

ELIZABETH JENNINGS

Gift of Tongues

Imagine now the simple table laid,
The bottles full of wine, the loaves of bread,
And the one woman coming and twelve men
Not as to that last supper when great doubt
Was washed away and finally cast out:
Visions were past now and their lives began

Again, had to be lived in usual ways
In new simplicity with all the blaze
Of glory passed into a chafing dish.
Their lord had risen and they waited for
The promised word, the message to restore
Aspiring souls back to the naked flesh.

At first they talked of ordinary things,
Not the great days now gone but gatherings
Of men who sought an order to their lives.
Then suddenly their speech became confused,
They spoke of things they did not know, they praised
As a man praises his new-found beliefs.

Yet they grew strange to one another, stared
At faces unfamiliar now. The word
That each man found was made for him alone.
The broken bread lay by each plate uneaten,
The flasks of wine stood by untouched, forgotten.
The easy friendship of the meal was gone.

Each man rode on the skill of his own tongue
As children do who take a foreign song
And shape their lives within its rise and fall.
Each was enlarged by language and went out
To test his eloquence beyond, to shout
And make great silence subject to his call.

So each went on his way and spread his speech
And marvelled at the sound of words, the rich
Music that held the people. Yet there was
Such distance between words and what they spoke
About, the marvels would not stand but broke
Away. This language seemed no fitting place

To hold a glory known, for words stay still
While myths burst out of languages they fill.
' This is no way to share the peace we knew '
They said, ' We must find silence once again.
Only a faithful silence can contain
The mystery we watched.' They went back to

The place where all the leaping tongues had come
Where now was shadowed silence in the room.
The story that they preached was sheltered here,
Not in the echoes of their garrulous speech
But in the sudden moment held when each
Could not distinguish ecstasy from fear.

GEORGE P. ELLIOTT

Her Lover

My lover at my dark door calling
Knocks his tears against it — ' I am cold.
Down here, from outward thinly leaking,
Drizzles the void, my dear, my dear.'

How can I seal myself against the hearing?
' Oh, stars are farther than can make me warm.
Looking for you for twenty circlings,
I rode the wobbling world around the sun.'

Silent at the keyhole, breathing his breath,
What should my lips against this lock be whispering?
I love you? Yes, I love you. Go! Go!
' Will you not hear the tears of my knocking?'

Oh, run from my dark door lest I open wide.
The need in me that quivers at your pounding,
My necessary lover, is a whirl of void;
You would tumble in, whirl without ending.

HAROLD SILVER

Proof of Love

That no man might disdain the colour of her eyes,
flood, oh flood, the world with colours,
painters — jostle palettes about the cardboard skies,
poets — leap with songs from cellars
till golden moon go tipsy and silver sun arise,
that no man might disdain the colour of her eyes.

That no man mock at lovers and none at lovers' ways,
fairgrounds — fill with folk, and after,
conjurers and clowns — go startle and amaze;
monumentalise man's laughter,
drown circuses with wonder and pantomimes with praise,
that no man mock at lovers and none at lovers' ways.

That no man think love weakens or shackles with decrees,
help us pummel mighty mountains,
kick out shafts for mines and blow to sleep the seas,
link the stars for Christmas lanterns,
and trespass every human heart's interstices,
that no man think love weakens or shackles with decrees.

That no man think her silent or faltering or proud,
let strong-limbed choruses go striding:
guardsmen are not steadfast, trumpets are not loud,
when lovers' cavalcades go riding,
for these can take their footsteps where none have been allowed.
Let no man think her silent or faltering or proud.

CHARLES DURANTY

Poem for a Death in Africa

The golden lions in cortège,
Hollow with hunger,
Break through unexpected glades,
Stirring grass and thorn
To minute dialects of pain.

Sudden as the lambasting rains
His life is washed away
And you, who have embraced suburbia,
Can offer no assurances
That his journey will not be desolate.

GILLIAN CRAIG

La Linea

Once over the border
The humped waste falls away
Towards a perched-up sea
And the parched goats fill the earth
With their terrible pulling at the weeds
Between the concrete lines.

This is a land which cannot afford
Pride of rejection, fearlessly the eyes
Discharge the hatred of the mind
As the smooth line of ticking cars
Passes the beggar's outstretched hands.

With a passport and a permit
You can adopt this town
For complacent travel talk:
Babble the beauty of the arid mountains'
Furious climax into lucent space
And tell how the people fight the sordid
Life-battle with a shouting song.

These slick accounts gloss an outrageous truth:
For the sea can nowhere drown the wanting cry
Of cripples who revolt beyond compassion,
And boys whose laughter shatters
With the ghastly calm of those
Deprived too young of tears.

PROMISE AND FULFILMENT

Riding Lights, by Norman MacCaig. (Hogarth Press, 7/6.)
Friday's Child, by Wilfrid Watson. (Faber, 9/6.)
The Mirage in the South, by Hubert Nicholson. (Heinemann, 8/6.)
Rainbow at Midnight, by Lawrence Lipton. (Golden Quill Press, Francestown, New Hampshire, $2.00.)
Timid Phoenix, by Chris Bjerknes. (The Author, n.p.)

'TO be a poet at twenty is to be twenty,' once wrote Charles Péguy, 'but to be a poet at forty is to be a real poet.' Mr MacCaig, who was born in 1911, would still be considered young enough by today's standards to figure in an anthology of young poets, the age limit here being not much under fifty. Nevertheless, *Riding Lights* is, I believe, Mr MacCaig's third volume; he was already known in the early 'forties as a furious, gallant outrider of the apocalyptic White Horseman at a time when many of our younger poets and critics were still at school, if not in kindergarten. Mr MacCaig's early poetry offered as pretty a show of imagistic fireworks as any written at that time. But such displays are, alas, transitory, and the stick was not long in thudding to the ground. Yet beneath the pyrotechnic obfuscation a 'real poet' in Péguy's sense was hidden; with *Riding Lights* he has emerged. MacCaig's new book is an immeasurable advance on the earlier ones; or, to put it another way, he is now writing a far more interesting kind of poetry, and writing much better. It is intellectual enough to satisfy current criteria. It is also — at its best — deeply passionate. His verse is now formal, complex, and tightly organised: its subject is largely himself. Not, I hasten to add, that there is anything of the romantic egoist about Mr MacCaig. It is rather that he apprehends subjectively, 'existentially' even, those philosophical problems that for most of us are no more than academic puzzles. Am I real? Is anything else real? If solipsism is valid, what then is love? These are the questions with which MacCaig wrestles. His is a poetry of metaphysical isolation, an isolation stoically endured:

> Ishmael among the phenomena, I hide
> In unreal deserts. Boredom is my weather
> And bitterness the water in its wells.
> Grave facts go by and pitch their tents together;
> Their night-fire tells
> Me to observe that light and keep outside
> In my darkness where no moon can be,
> Since I've destroyed it for not being me.

The tone is serious to the point of grimness; yet love — whether real or illusory — can at times break the isolation:

> Blunt shadows flutter to a warming flame
> Since you came to my little greedy room
> And with a word destroyed a long year's gloom
> (Small candle that still burns and stays the same).
> I who had nowhere else to go now do
> Such journeys (here) as lie from me to you,
> And think them nothing; which Time thinks them too.

This passage, incidentally, shows the remarkable use which MacCaig has made of Donne ; it is more than mere *pastiche,* I feel, since there is a genuine affinity, though the imitation in these lines is altogether too uncomfortably close and clever ; change the spelling a little, and one would need to know Donne very well to be quite sure that he did *not* write them. Blake, also, seems to have influenced MacCaig in some moods :

> There's a moment that will take
> The martyr from his leaning stake
> And rule the tortured brain with laws
> Larger than its great Because.

He does not deal exclusively with *paysages intérieurs* ; he writes with careful observation about Highland landscapes or Edinburgh streets, though the metaphysically obtrusive 'I' is never far away. And in some poems there is a lyrical note clearer and simpler than anything in the passages I have quoted. Mr MacCaig's poetry, it is true, will not be to everyone's taste : it is often excessively difficult, there is a harshness and dryness about much of it that is not particularly inviting, and at times he forces the note, becomingly decidedly *voulu.* There is, too, something rather disconcerting about the spectacle of an intelligence continually questioning the ground on which it stands. Yet even allowing for these limitations, *Riding Lights* is a profoundly interesting book, containing some of the most individual and accomplished poetry now being written.

Mr Watson, I take it, is younger than Mr MacCaig ; he has also much less to say. Other reviewers have already commented on the derivative nature of his poems ; it is, I am afraid, their most immediately noticeable quality. Dylan Thomas and Yeats are his principal influences, but there are several others. There is nothing wrong with derivation as such ; provided there is an authentic impetus behind the poem, and the poet knows precisely what he is doing, even a close imitation can be poetically valid (*vide* Mr MacCaig and Donne). But Mr Watson is much less certain. He seems to be aiming at a lyrically 'pure' poetry, which is an excellent intention — the more kinds of poetry being written, the better — but is not so easy to bring off. In places he does so, but more often he produces patches of *faux-naïf* folksiness and pseudo-nursery-rhyme. Mr Watson is intelligent and knows how to write ; in the fullest sense he shows plenty of promise, and in a few years he may turn out something really worth while. But on his present form, the publication of *Friday's Child* seems a little premature.

Mr Nicholson is a depressed and depressing writer, observing landscapes (mainly northern) with a tired eye, producing stretches of limp, drooping verse. One can get away with practically anything in poetry except dullness ; Mr Nicholson, unfortunately, is dull all the way through. Where Nicholson is tired and flat, Mr Lipton is excitable and clever. Mostly he is excited — or alarmed — about the *Zeitgeist* :

> *Agnosco ergo sum.* We've come full circle.
> Velocity, cohesion, color, sound,
> Waves and radiations : *res extensa.*
> Giordano Bruno chemically changed
> By thermal action.

Lipton has a lively and well-stocked mind ; he sounds like an interesting person to have round for an evening's conversation. He has, I believe, already made a certain reputation as a novelist, and has turned comparatively recently to poetry. Whether he is essentially a poet I am not at all sure: not that he is unconscious of the problems of poetic art — I would say that in his handling of blank verse he has learnt a lot from Allen Tate, though not always to good effect — but there is a lack of inevitability about his poetic language: I feel that his ideas might as well, or better, have been expressed in prose. There can be no doubt whether the irrepressible Mr Bjerknes is a poet. He is ; but a bad one. Here and there, among all the froth of images and surrealist *disjecta membra,* one comes across unmistakable traces of the real thing. Remembering Mr MacCaig's remarkable recent development, who would be rash enough to say that there is no hope for Mr Bjerknes?

Bernard Bergonzi

ACCURATELY PENNED

Collected Poems, William Empson. (Chatto and Windus, 15/-.)

THIS collected volume contains both Mr Empson's earlier books of verse and several additional poems, including a masque, *The Birth of Steel.* The book enables most people to read for the first time the poems, apart from those well anthologised, which were contained in the rare 1935 *Poems.* It has been fashionable among the younger critics to observe a decline in the quality of the later poems. To the present writer, however, much of the verse of the second volume, *The Gathering Storm* (1940) and after seems rather to represent an advance on that of the earlier book. There are exceptions among the poems: *This Last Pain* and *Legal Fiction* have not been bettered. But it is on the whole true that there are Empson poems, mainly in the earlier volume, which can please the reader who unravels them by their sheer intricacy alone (because the act of unravelling is a very satisfying experience) but may thereby distract him from consideration of technical means or from the actual suitability of the comparisons. A good example is the early poem, *The Ants,* the first in this book. Mr Empson's note on it is 'THE ANTS build mud galleries into trees to protect the greenfly they get sugar from, and keep them warm in the nest during winter.' The poem begins:

> We tunnel through your noonday out to you.
> We carry our tube's narrow darkness there
> Where, nostrum-plastered, with prepared air,
> With old men running and trains whining through
>
> We ants may tap your aphids for your dew.

The reader has to guess the ambiguity of 'tube', which means 'underground railway' as well as the mud tube of the ants ; he has to see the tunnel 'nostrum-plastered' and think of the advertisements lining station platforms ; and he must think of busy city workers tapping the parasites of the world for their

livelihood as the ants tap the aphids. But when this has come home to him, he must, if he goes on thinking about it, agree that the comparison of the ants' galleries with the underground is not a very exact one. This is the case with several other of those earlier poems which are frequently, for their metaphysical richness, preferred to the later ones. (*Arachne* and *Letter II* are quoted by Mr Geoffrey Strickland in an article in *Mandrake* No. 9 as examples of a similar dichotomy: 'disconnected observations of a totally different nature held together by the thin thread of Empson's conceit.')

With exceptions, the poems of *The Gathering Storm*, and after, left behind this particular tendency. Many of them are only a little less difficult, but their range, and the skill of the poet in relating the poetic material to the theme, seem greater. Some of the splendidly outrageous comparisons have gone, but a mature, wise poetry has replaced a verbal virtuosity that was sometimes cold. The later poems sometimes compress an immense emotion into reserved, uncomplaining lines (as in *Missing Dates* and *Let it Go*). The thought shows wider and profounder experience (the fact of the earthquake in *Aubade* impinges on the poet's private experience and sets off a brilliant train of reflections on private and then public events). And something like good humour is added to good wit.

But the overall lesson of this collection consists in the detached, unhysterical and — on the highest level — sensible, spirit of all the poems. Beneath the surface of fifties writing is a profound and determined impatience with the established values of the fifties world, no less strong for being less declamatory and less 'popular' than the protest of the thirties. The poetic example of William Empson has done much to establish this philosophy in a firm and a sober style.

A. B.

A HUMAN MYTH

A Way of Looking, Elizabeth Jennings. (Andre Deutsch, 8/6.)
The Less Deceived, Philip Larkin. (Marvell Press, 253 Hessle Road, Hull, Yorks, 6/-.)
The Flitting, J. C. Grant. (Chatto and Windus, 7/6.)

THE first thing one notices about *A Way of Looking* is the relevance of the title to all the poems in it, mainly, I feel, because Miss Jennings is concerned with a few themes which are constantly recurring. It is for this reason that the poems gain in significance and stature with each reading since, as familiarity with them grows in the reader, he finds that a poem, which at first looked slight, has accumulated a wealth of overtones suggested by the others which gives it an almost indefinable power ; rather as if a stone had been allowed to create ripples in a pool and then more stones until we are conscious of a complexity of pattern and are not quite sure how it all happened.

The poems seem to spring from one theme, that of personal identity. Many of them deal with the problem of how much of oneself an observer imposes on what he sees. Thus Miss Jennings writes a great deal about landscapes, the mind wishing almost to create out of what it sees its own complete expression. The symbolic imputations of this are obviously very large, and the problems of solitariness, of appearances, of communication with what we see and experience and with other people, arise naturally out of it.

The word 'problem' describes the nature of these poems. Not that they are lacking in clarity, since they are remarkably lucid, but because the poet is always concerned, I feel, with poetry as a means of imposing a comprehensive pattern on the apparent formlessness of everyday experience. It is almost like a search for lost equations — sometimes by reclaiming old myths — although she is much too honest to suggest any pat answers.

A sense of answers never found dominates this book. We can never be sure of what we see, of others or of ourselves. In her own image, we only have accurate maps for journeys we have already made, and do not wish to make again. What we desire is the naked vision,

> 'Without these hands to trap and touch;
> Bodiless I would prove my passion
> By learning the character of each
> Landscape or person that I love,
> Clothing them only with contemplation.

To achieve this Miss Jennings imposes a strict discipline of language upon herself. She has no place for excess ; her rhythms, diction and verse forms are normal and unsurprising ; at times almost prosaic in her attempt to make us look beyond the poetry to what the poetry indicates. This can give rise to a certain monotony, as can her limitation of subject. But it is only a superficial appearance of monotony. What we actually find is an insistence upon what is important in life and in poetry, creating a series of poems, the reading of which is a valuable and very moving experience. They deserve the widest possible audience.

The newly-formed Marvell Press looks like becoming one of the most

important poetry publishing houses, if the standard of their first volume is maintained. Philip Larkin is one of the best poets who have emerged since the war, and his latest volume contains a selection of work from the last ten years. He has a real ability to turn the most unlikely situations into poetry. Subjects which could so easily get out of hand and vanish in a mist of fake sentiment, such as old racehorses, myxomatosis, photograph albums, childhood, are treated with a mixture of satire and love which is unique in contemporary poetry. At times he is extraordinarily funny, as in the opening of 'Church Going', or the description of faked childhood memories in 'I Remember, I Remember', or the desire to get away from it all in 'Poetry of Departures'. But there is usually an underlying seriousness, as in 'Church Going' as a whole, where the difficult transition from one plane to another is achieved with unobtrusive skill. All the poems in this book are worth reading again and again, since they are an object lesson in controlled writing. There are no loose edges to these poems, hardly an irrelevant word or phrase. One is conscious of a mature artist working very easily inside his chosen medium, producing such successes as the beautiful, concise ending to *No Road . . .*

> To watch that world come up like a cold sun,
> Rewarding others, is my liberty.
> Not to prevent it is my will's fulfilment.
> Willing it, my ailment.

J. C. Grant has been writing for quite a long time to produce such a slim selected poems, and one can only hope that this very limited output will be maintained, for I can see little to recommend these poems. There are a few unexciting lyrics, and the rest of the volume is devoted to longish poems written in long swooping lines. The sensation of reading them is very much like that of a ponderous switchback slowly gathering momentum, and arousing a pressing need to get out before sickness starts. They are about 'Nature' and 'Childhood', and the usual companion themes. A good idea of the type of verse can be gathered from:

> I held my breath from the flowing ferment,
> From the sonorous soliloquy, as of swarming organ-voiced bees,
> From the white shivering surge sown on the earth-dark reef
> And crying like windswept corn, from the pebbles with their
> happy prattling voices,
> From the dim undying accompaniment of derelict sea shells . . .

If you can bear this going on over five pages of closely packed verse, interspersed with such ejaculations as 'lonely I trembled in the calm immensity of night' and 'O, happy humility of truth', then I recommend this book.

D. K.

SOME CONTRIBUTORS

RICHARD EBERHART, the distinguished American poet, was born in 1904. He was a contributor to the Cambridge magazine, *Experiment* (1929-30) and has published several volumes of poems in England.

GABRIEL PEARSON (Balliol College, Oxford) obtained a First in English last year and is now doing research.

CHARLES DURANTY has published poems in *The Listener* and is the author of a pamphlet, *Audition*, published by the Guild Press.

GEORGE P. ELLIOTT is Assistant Professor of English at St. Mary's College, California. His stories and poems have been published in many English and American magazines.

HAROLD SILVER has published poems in numerous magazines, including the Cambridge review, *Concern*.

GILLIAN CRAIG graduated from Oxford in 1953. She is now married and living in Holland.

The Contemporary Poetry and Music Circle (Stanton Coit House, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, W.8) holds meetings on the second Monday of each month from October to May. Particulars will be sent on application to Alec Craig, 5 Avenue House, Belsize Park Gardens, N.W.3.

Spring 1956. DEPARTURE is published three times a year. Business and Circulation Manager: Gerald Fowler, Lincoln College, Oxford. Contributions of poetry, prose, and criticism are welcomed. These should be accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope or, if sent from abroad, an International Reply Coupon, and should be sent to the Editors either at St. John's College, Oxford, or at 36 Fordel Road, Catford, London, S.E.6. Subscription: for single copy 1/2 or 35c post free. For one year 3/6 or $1. (American subscribers should send cash if possible.)
DEPARTURE is distributed in the U.S.A. by Selected Outlets, B. De Boer, P.O. Box 761, Hoboken, New Jersey.